



# Digital Participatory Poetics and Civic Engagement in the Creative Writing Classroom

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the ways a team-taught course, “Public Poetry in a Digital World,” supported community-building through participatory action and digital creative making. Using digital texts responding to current events, this course fostered students’ civic imagination and invited them to make connections among their own lives, their communities and poetic civic media. This class facilitated critical community engagement through digital pedagogy and final projects in which students performed public scholarship. Ultimately, this course serves as a case study of how teaching born-digital texts with digital tools can expand the capacity of the creative writing classroom.*

## ESSAY

### PUBLIC POETRY IN A DIGITAL WORLD

When we assigned “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me” by Christopher Soto, our students had already seen the poem on social media. It had been liked or reblogged hundreds of times in the summer of 2016. Elegizing the Pulse shooting in Orlando, this poem spread quickly across media platforms as a viral expression of grief and protest. But almost none of our students had clicked on the link; they had not actually read the poem until we assigned it for seminar.

As usual in our co-taught course, “Public Poetry in a Digital World,” a student was leading seminar discussion that morning. This was an advanced high school seminar where we surveyed the ways publication technologies, such as the printing press, mimeographs, YouTube, and Twitter,

have influenced politically conscious poetic movements. That day, as the class began, our student discussion leader asked us all to stand in a circle at our desks and each read a line of “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me” out loud. Prompted by this poem’s heartfelt elegy and the collective mourning of its many digital readers, we held an informal vigil by reading the lines together:

*Last time, I saw myself die is when police killed Jessie Hernandez*

*A 17 year old brown queer, who was sleeping in their car*

*Yesterday, I saw myself die again. Fifty times I died in Orlando.*

(Soto)

In the summer of 2016, over the course of our intensive six-week seminar, we had already witnessed highly publicized violence in the form of shootings and police brutality. Students were living together in a residential program and processing many of these events as a community and in our class meetings. Our seventeen-year-old students, mostly students of color, and many of whom identified as LGBTQ, were bearing witness to this violence with new, adult understanding while also, in Soto’s “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me,” seeing themselves represented in literature for one of the first times. One student reported mixed feelings; she was moved to see someone described as “brown, queer and 17” in a poem. But at the same time, like Soto, she was shaken to find herself reflected in the victims of the shooting.

In the emotional discussion that followed the poem’s recitation, we asked our students why they had not clicked on the link when they first encountered “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me” online. Our students’ responses shed light on the function of poetry in the digital age, as viral literature is disseminated like mass media. Shared as a form of hashtag activism, the poem had, for some, become a gesture of superficial solidarity. For others, it was a reminder of a trauma that was too painful to engage with in a casual online space. One student said she was relieved to read Soto’s poem in a context where it could operate complexly: for her, the text had been reclaimed as poetry in the space of the seminar.

This classroom vigil is just one example of the generative community that sprung up among our students in this seminar. In this paper, we will discuss the ways that our course supported community-building through participatory culture and digital creative making. Like “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me,” many of the poems we assigned engaged with current events and encouraged students to make connections with their own lives and communities. We facilitated this civic engagement through digital pedagogy and final projects in which students performed public scholarship. We will conclude by considering how teaching born-digital texts with digital tools can expand the capacity of the creative writing classroom.

## PUBLIC POETRY, PARTICIPATORY CULTURE, AND MEDIA CONVERGENCE

Over the course of our seminar, we saw students form ad hoc communities that facilitated creative making. Following Chet Breaux's insights in "Why Making?," our understanding of creative making centers participatory culture and remediation. We chose to begin this paper with "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" because it suggests the participatory culture of both our classroom community and of the poetry community in the digital age. Responding to a contemporary crisis in the wake of the Orlando Pulse shooting, "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" turned readers into creative participants. Readers and social media users responded to the poem, creating communities of support by sharing and commenting on it online. Meanwhile, the poem travelled through physical and online spaces in the weeks after the shooting as it was remediated in print, digital, and face-to-face contexts.

As Buck and Bellwoar note, and Breaux emphasizes, making in digital writing communities highlights "the complex ways in which physical and digital spaces are connected and integrated and the productive ways in which writers move between them" (Bellwoar and Buck, as cited in Breaux). Our class response to "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" was an example of just such movement between, and integration of, physical and digital spaces. Soto had recently performed the poem at a community vigil in New York City, which Emily [a co-author of this article] happened to have attended in person; then, the poem travelled through online publications, into social media posts, into letterpress broadsides sold on Etsy, into our classroom, and into our own communal acts of mourning. Our students did more than remediate this born-digital poem into a face-to-face performance. Ultimately, one of our students decided to respond to Soto's poem with a further remediation, by selectively erasing words from of "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" to craft her own elegy. She then shared this poem with Soto via email. Moving across social media and digital publication platforms, "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" became an unusual example of what Henry Jenkins calls media convergence: a phenomenon where participatory culture drives content across diverse media platforms.

Although literary poems are very different from the "mass media" that Henry Jenkins explores in *Convergence Culture*, Heather Inwood has shown, in her study of poems responding to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, that poetry can participate in media convergence, particularly when the poem touches on an event that is felt as a national tragedy (Inwood, 934). As we studied the ways "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me" circulated across media platforms and into our classroom, our response to the poem both participated in media convergence and gave students space and time to analyze this phenomenon. As part of our analysis of the poem, we guided students through its reception history as it moved from the online journal LitHub to other publication platforms and social media. But the

poem's reach was not just technological. The acts of liking, reblogging, reading, and creating a literary erasure from the poem were all extensions of the community-gathering that occurred at vigils where this poem was read. By participating in the performance and remediation of this poem, students turned the text into a resource for themselves to make sense of the violence they had witnessed.

## **COMMUNITY BUILDING IN A NETWORKED CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM**

"Public Poetry in a Digital World" was a nontraditional literature and creative writing class, where learning took place in three-hour morning seminar meetings and in evening discussions online. Since community engagement was a focus of our course, we modeled strategies for building personal and creative community in the face-to-face classroom and in our online learning spaces. We also built opportunities for student leadership into our course design, so by the end of the summer, students were directing both face-to-face and online discussions as well as taking the initiative to create their own online communities. In our course, when students were empowered to shape and direct their own digital communities, we observed that significant learning happens online. Specifically, students practiced L. Dee Fink's significant learning categories of integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn in online spaces which they went on to build upon in subsequent face-to-face seminars.

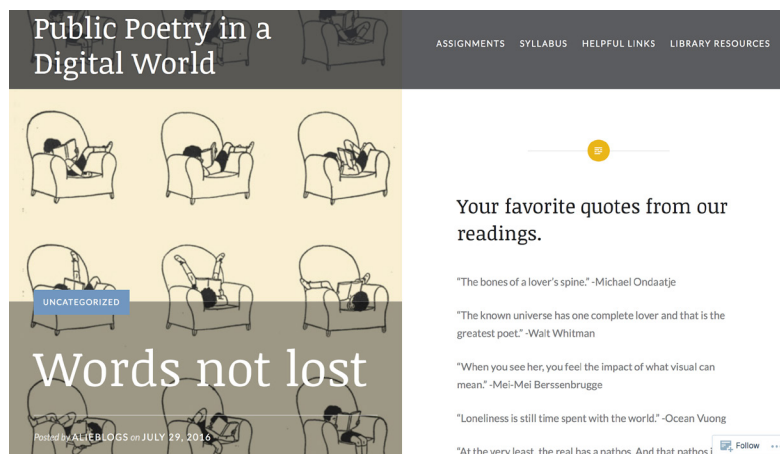
A centerpiece of our course was our collaborative course blog, where students posted daily reading responses. At the beginning of the summer, we asked students to volunteer to lead class on a day when the readings particularly interested them. In preparation for this day, in their role as blog moderators, students wrote an initial blog post setting the terms of the next day's face-to-face discussion. They posed questions, provided examples from the text, and proposed possible connections to other readings. The moderator then followed the online discussion on their assigned day, checking the blog several times over the course of the evening. In the next day's face-to-face seminar discussions, student leaders directed the conversation for an hour, guiding their classmates through traditional literary analysis and diverse creative responses. As discussion leaders, students called on their classmates to contribute and called on instructors as well when we wanted to contribute to or redirect the discussion.

In addition to facilitating class community and online discourse, the course blog became an important site of creative making. As the praxis of our course, we wanted students to enact concepts from the assigned texts in their own writing and creative projects. Although we initially designed the blog as a platform for scholarly writing and conversation, students quickly took ownership of the blog to turn it into a dual academic and student-led creative space. Our students' creative use of digital space began as an extension of our face-to-face meetings. As instructors, we offered optional

creative writing workshops outside of class time that allowed students to share their work in an informal, non-evaluative setting. These “poetry cafés” were popular among our students, and it quickly became apparent that they wanted to deepen and continue the creative work that they began in these face-to-face meetings.

Without any instructor intervention, students made space in the digital classroom to continue this creative making and sharing. Discussion moderators began posting creative prompts along with each day’s reading response, so that their classmates could contribute to the comment thread with both creative and scholarly work. Students then went on to create a separate blog post, titled “Speak Now, Poet,” specifically for sharing original poems and other creative responses. They responded to each other’s poems with care, supporting and encouraging each other. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins describes the participatory culture of fan fiction communities, noting that “what’s striking about this process is that it takes place outside the classroom and beyond any direct adult control. Kids are teaching kids what they need to become full participants in convergence culture” (185). Jenkins notes that “educators are coming to value the learning that takes place in these informal and recreational spaces” (187). Indeed, we worked to create the conditions in which these informal, recreational spaces could thrive. From informal “poetry cafés” to blog comments to dedicated blog threads, we saw students’ creative work migrate across media platforms, as they embraced participatory culture.

A final platform that we used to facilitate student engagement was the annotation tool Education Genius. As a Google Chrome extension, Genius allows users to annotate any static page on the internet. Many of our assigned course texts were available digitally, either publicly on the internet



*Fig. 1. A post on the course blog where students shared favorite passages from readings over the course of the summer. This post was created and curated with no instructor guidance.*

or as excerpts on our blog. As part of their assigned reading, students were required to annotate the texts. As instructors, we participated in these discussions by contributing our own annotations, posing questions, correcting misunderstandings, and building on students' points. These Genius annotations supplemented the conversations on the course blog, since they allowed students to respond to each others' interpretations of specific passages, expanding or refining each other's ideas. They could make connections to other texts and directly share those texts with their classmates. Their annotations also included links to and quotations from external sources, highlighting political and historical context, or biographical information about the writer. They frequently included photographs or multimedia in their annotations that clarified a phrase or concept. For work we read in translation, we also posted the text in the original language; we saw bilingual students challenge the translation within Genius—a powerful use of the tool which we had not anticipated. Our collective annotation became an additional space for classmates to engage with the text and one another.

Genius annotations played a unique role in our classroom, as they amplified the voices of quiet students. At the beginning of the summer, there were a few students who, because of self-reported imposter syndrome, rarely spoke in class but quickly became respected as digital contributors. On Genius, they could make valuable contributions by admitting they didn't know something and looking up a new word or concept to share with their peers. By inquiring about the text at hand and self-directing their annotations, students bolstered their academic empowerment. What's more, annotating texts through Genius enabled a unique form of participatory culture in our classroom. Jenkins compares the learning process in participatory culture to pedagogical scaffolding, "providing support for... new steps until the learner feels sufficient confidence to take them on their own. In the classroom, scaffolding is provided by the teacher. In participatory culture, the entire community takes on some responsibility" (187). When students shared the task of annotating a text, they all took on responsibility for scaffolding the lesson. They helped each other learn how to learn (see Fig. 2). When reading a complex, allusive text, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by Claudia Rankine, in hard copy, one of our students observed that he missed using Genius, since there were many references he would have liked to explain for his classmates.



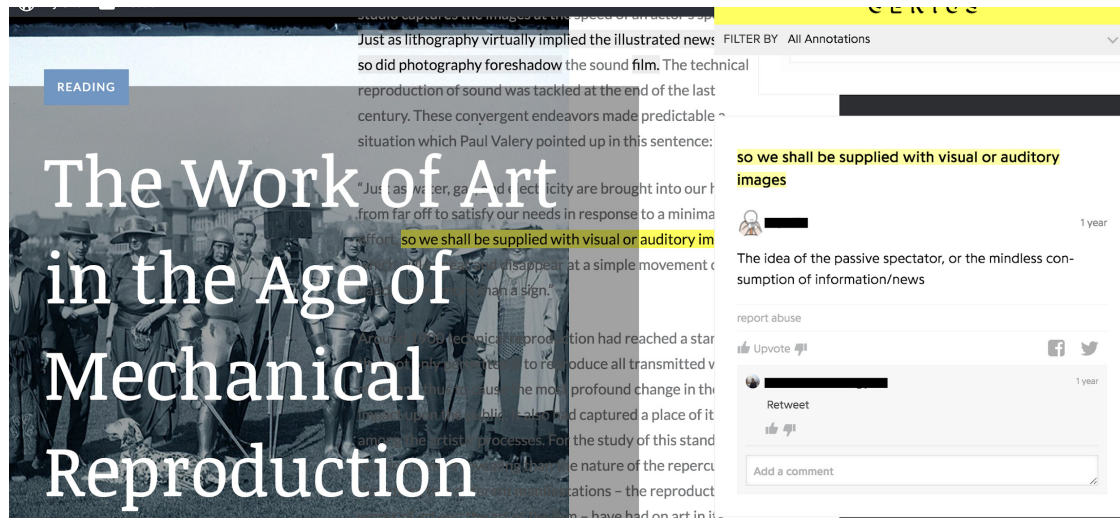


Fig. 2. A student interprets a passage from an assigned text in this Genius annotation on our course blog. Another student responds appreciatively and compares their exchange to “retweeting” on Twitter.

While designing “Public Poetry in a Digital World,” we strove to center the needs and abilities of our students. Central to our approach was user centered design, an approach to building a course based on usability testing (Shivers-McNair, 2018; Jones, 2018; Eyman, 2009). In keeping with the tenants of responsiveness and accountability in user centered course design, we solicited feedback from students throughout our time together, from our first-day presentation of course materials to our final goodbye activities. Responding to student requests, we created multiple iterations of the syllabus throughout the course, changing not only the visual appearance of the document but also its content. We also invited students to set the terms of their own engagement in digital and face-to-face spaces. In their comments on the blog, students followed an online community agreement that they crafted together at the start of the summer, laying the groundwork for respectful and rigorous online engagement. Through student-led reflection and discussion, online and face-to-face, students shaped the culture, structure, and content of their own learning environment. By treating our students as “expert end users,” we were able to responsively revise our use of instructional technologies, such as the course blog and Genius annotations (Jones). We had the flexibility to implement iterative course design because our course did not include traditional assessment, and our longform comments at the end of the summer acknowledged students’ contributions towards shaping the course. Students reported feeling ownership not just of the content of the course, but also its human dimension; they invested in the learning environment because they have a hand in creating it.

Like many people their age, our students had active lives on the internet prior to our class. They maintained web presences and communicated digitally every day. While classroom use of social media opened up many positive possibilities for our coursework, there are risks to having students work in semi-public or public spheres. We prepared our students to navigate these risks by modeling safe online practices, and we took precautions within our own pedagogy to protect students online. Our course blog was password protected, so students' initial interpretations of texts and blog posts were only available to their peers and teachers. As they began their final assignment, we assigned an internet-safety quiz that prepared students to safely practice digital public scholarship. We also mediated risks by having students anonymize their own content. There were no real names or other identifying information on their blog posts, Genius posts, or final projects. Some projects addressed specific audiences or engaged sensitive subject matter. In those cases, student sent out invitations or kept their web content password protected.

Our in-class activities and discussions were made much richer by our students' sincere engagement on and co-ownership of our blog. The community our students built online was bolstered and renewed by our time in the classroom and at our daily lunch at the dorm where our students lived communally. Our class was an experiment in weaving the dynamic tools of face-to-face teaching and digital learning in ways that uplift both, making for expansive class discussions where a wide range of student abilities were valued. In our course, students' embrace of participatory culture made them a generative community of scholars and poets, in person and on the internet.

## **STUDENT-DRIVEN POETIC CIVIC MEDIA AND CIVIC IMAGINATION**

For their final project, students were charged with bringing the tools and lessons of the course into their home communities using digital creative making. We deliberately asked students to consider how poetry could serve their home communities, instead of the college town where they found themselves during our summer seminar. In the spirit of Stephanie Bower and John Murray's "Writing in the Community" we wanted to explore poetry as both a product and a method of academic civic engagement, and to study the capacity of poetry as a tool for the civic imagination. But, because we were operating within a six week term, we did not feel we could engage with local community partners with sincere reciprocity. Our students were walking into our classroom with complex membership in various communities. So, we asked them to consider how poetry, as a digital form of public scholarship, could reflect their civic responsibilities to these communities. This project rested on our understanding that poetry in public space has the capacity to act as a form of civic media and poetry online can become digital civic media. In the case of "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me," our students became peripherally aware of the poem through their social networks



online. The poem, as digital, shareable document—even as a thumbnail—served as a symbol of collective mourning and protest. The work reached its full potential as civic media when that digital collectivity became embodied. In face-to-face vigils and classroom conversations, recitations of this poem made space for communities to mourn. Meanwhile, the poem’s text was a space for deliberation, an intimate resource for readers reeling from horrific images of gun violence.

In their final projects, we asked students to attempt this kind of community building around poetry. They responded by continuing their engagement with digital participatory culture, using digital tools to connect poetic texts with their own communities. Students were aware of the final assignment from our very first class meeting. The following assignment description appeared in the front matter of our digital syllabus, a live Google Doc embedded in our course blog, and in this way, the final project helped to set the tone and scope of our coursework together:

Final project:

*It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably everyday  
for lack  
of what is found there.*  
William Carlos Williams

*Never forget justice is what love looks like in public.*  
Dr. Cornel West

Can poetry function to make *your* community more just? If we take for granted the sentiments of West and Williams, how can we use digital tools to increase public access to poetry, and by extension, to make our society more vital and fair? In this project, you’ll begin by identifying a group or community to which you belong. Using action research methodologies, reflect on your personal relationship to this group and how you believe poetry could serve it. Assess the demographics, needs, and level of technological access in this community. Then choose a digital medium from the many we have studied and explain how this medium makes sense to showcase a poetic text. In the final week of class, we’ll transform the seminar into a digital humanities lab to develop and implement these projects. This work will be accompanied by a final paper reflecting on the methodology of your project, the thinkers by which it is informed, and the ways it enacts and interprets the content of the texts you have chosen to curate.

We read the quotes by Williams and West out loud on the first day of class and returned to them as students were devising their final projects. Over the course of the summer, our discussions of the final project were shaped by the contemporary poetry and digital poetic culture we studied, framing digital-born (or in some cases, digitally-curated) political poetry as a dynamic form of public scholarship and civic media. Students had studied Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon's "America, November 2014," a poem written after the murder of Tamir Rice. This poem was shared on the #BlackPoets-SpeakOut Tumblr, which showcased powerful video poetry recitations in collective mourning and protest of police brutality. Our students had also studied the famously viral poem, "Rape Joke" by Patricia Lockwood that satirized and meditated on rape culture in the United States. These poems, like many from our course, were reflections on what the writers perceived as injustice. Various audiences reiterated and expanded on these social critiques by sharing and commenting on these poems on digital platforms, exposing the texts to wider publics through media convergence. These pieces of poetic civic media became elements of a larger digital discourse about what justice looks like and what it doesn't look like.

All term, we studied how politically conscious poetic movements imagined a more just society through civic engagement activities including readings, salons, protests, and innovative publishing practices. As Jenkins suggests in *By Any Media Necessary*, young people are now using digital technologies to develop "ways of expressing a shared vision for a better society" (37). In their final projects, students applied what they had learned by creating a digital space that might serve their own communities. Through final projects that remediated poems, our students expressed their own visions of a better society and extended participatory culture from our classroom into their communities.

We have curated a few examples of student work from these final projects that best express creative making as an act of civic engagement. For her final, one student created a project called /poetverse/, which she described as "a Tumblr blog designed to increase access to poetry for the queer youth of South Korea, a heavily oppressed body of individuals. . . . /poetverse/ exists as a safe space for these individuals to convene and express themselves through poetry." The blog's title contains the implication of an imagined alternative (or future) universe, one where the student's digitally-convened community is not oppressed. Simultaneously, however, the blog defiantly exists in our own imperfect universe, a project of protest, self-expression and community building.

Another student created an installation called "Ars Poetica" where poets could use Snapchat to anonymously post poems about being marginalized teenagers in suburban Texas. In her reflection on this project, she made a powerful connection between this installation and Michael Ondaatje's memoir *Running in the Family*. In the excerpt we read, Ondaatje described an ancient example of literary protest: "In the 5th Century B.C. graffiti poems were scratched onto the rock face of Sigiriya—the rock fortress of a despot king" (83). While our student acknowledged the differences

between her context and that of these ancient poets, as she wrote in her final essay, “the novelty of Snapchat hearkens back to the powerful anonymity of the king’s repossessed wall. . . . The quiet defiance against the ‘fortress of a despot king,’ against the wall’s symbolic significance as regime, can be echoed in our modern voices.” In her bold analysis, this student places Ondaatje’s text and the poems of her digital community in conversation with a history of anonymous protest poetry.

A third student created an archive of poet-submitted video poems, modeled directly on #BlackPoetsSpeakOut. She invited young woman-identified poets in her hometown of Katmandu, Nepal to respond to sexual repression and rape culture via spoken word poetry. Because of the nature of this project, she solicited submissions from the women in her close-knit poetry scene and kept videos on a password-protected blog. While this necessary security limited the videos’ immediate capacity as civic media, her final project reinterpreted the structure of #BlackPoetsSpeakOut for her unique content and community, and allowed her to practice organizing and curating a video archive of political poetry.

While the basic parameters of these projects were established by our pedagogical scaffolding, much of the complexity of student work stemmed from the participatory culture of our course’s digital space in which responsibility and authority were shared by all members of the community. As teachers, we were not well-versed in the capacity of Snapchat, Instagram, or Tumblr as sites for public poetry. Our students brought that critical knowledge, as well as other various knowledges from their complex lived experiences, to the seminar table. Armed with the models of the texts we read in class, our students created public scholarship and civic media that used poetry as a means of commentary or critique. Some of the projects by these rising high school seniors even articulated what alternative futures might look like. They used digital platforms to situate poetry in their communities, engaging poetry as both an introspective art and an avenue for social change.

When our students acted as makers, as Breaux points out, they had “the opportunity to focus on practices that can empower users,” revising and expanding their relationship to technology (32). We found that the practices that shifted students from users to makers often aligned with critical pedagogies that emphasized “mutuality,” as defined by Freire and many others after him. In his essay in *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the 21st Century*, Patrick Bizzaro introduces mutuality to the creative writing classroom, exploring “tangible tactics” to achieve the too-often elusive goals of critical pedagogy (99). While Bizzaro considers course architecture that promotes equitable relationships in the creative writing classroom, he mainly considers instructor responses, writing assignments, and ways to address students in a face-to-face classroom (119). We extended this inclusive course architecture to include the use of digital platforms, encouraging students to act as creative makers both in and beyond the face-to-face seminar.

## CONCLUSION: LESSONS OF OUR COURSE

With “Public Poetry in a Digital World,” we built a course that gave students tools to understand their networked, participatory experience of reading and writing poetry. We designed this course understanding that our students were probably already interacting with poetry extracurricularly online. As we learned when we assigned “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me,” our students were already aware of poems on social media. At the beginning of the course, many of our students told us that they had at least some experience with poetry through spoken word YouTube channels, Tumblr, Instagram, and Facebook groups. Students read, wrote, and held community in these digital spaces well before they entered our seminar. While we worked with a particularly motivated group of young people, this digital engagement with poetry is not unique to our students. In 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts found that since 2012, poetry readership has doubled among youth ages 18-24 (Iyengar). A statement from the Academy of American Poets suggests that this spread of poetry readership among youth is linked to social media use (*Poets.org*). We wanted to meet students in these online spaces, providing them with tools to understand and extend their experience of digital participatory poetics.

By offering students a theoretical framework with which to approach their experiences reading and writing online, we hoped to counter stereotypes that digital space is less academic or rigorous than traditional print media. We also wanted to resist a prevalent belief that poetry is overly introspective and does not *matter* in the contemporary world. By presenting politically conscious poems, installations, and digital projects as course texts, we provided our students with examples of contemporary poetry in dialogue with the complex world they were encountering both online and face-to-face. In studying digital civic poetics, our students came to view their own writing as vital and relevant and were able to see poetry as a form of digital civic media. Our syllabus accompanies this article (see Appendix), because we hope it will make clear the range of texts and assignments included in our course, suggesting the richness of the context that we brought to the digital spaces where our students already lived.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

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**Emily Oliver** is a poet and the interim Director of the Center for Community and Civic Engagement at Carleton College. She is the Co-PI on a CNCS-funded Community-based Participatory Action Research project that explores immigrant and refugee educational experiences in Faribault, MN. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *OmniVerse*, *Water~Stone*, *DIAGRAM* and elsewhere. She's been a recipient of a Sicca Grant, the Corson-Browning Poetry Prize and a Queens Council on the Arts New Work Grant. She runs Civic Poetics, a reading series.

## APPENDIX

### Course Syllabus

#### PUBLIC POETRY IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Emily Oliver and Liza Flum

Can a single poem change the world? In our seminar, we'll engage the tension between artistic contemplation and political action, asking how poetry might foster a more just society. Should poetry aspire to witness, document, or subvert political and economic systems? Or does the act of writing poetry, or making art, fundamentally challenge the status quo?

Beginning with oral traditions, we'll explore poetry as a communal art, examining the ways it has shaped cultural and national identities. We'll trace the poet's role in society, from communal voice to solitary seeker, outsider, and dissident. We'll also consider how, over time, publishing technologies have changed the ways poetry is produced, consumed, and shared—and how these changes have complicated and expanded poetry's social impact. Through case studies of politically conscious poetic movements, we'll assess the impact of new forms of publication and dissemination, such as the printing press, zines, Metrocards, podcasts, and YouTube. We will consider these topics in the context of larger conversations about race, gender, technological access, and traditional



literary analysis. We'll end by engaging critically with new information and communication technologies as they both increase and control access to literature. By the end of the course, students will design and build a digital project that increases access to poetry in a community to which they belong.

#### Writing Expectations:

In this class, we'll devote substantial time each day to poetry writing exercises, with particular attention to the resonance between our creative practice and our critical thought. Students will be invited to share these writings with the class. Students will also write frequent expository essays responding to the texts we study.

#### A Note on the Seminar Format:

While the majority of this seminar will be discussion-based, select sessions will include hands-on digital humanities workshops. We will supplement in-class activities with occasional afternoon field trips. Additionally, our conversation will continue beyond the walls of the classroom in two ways: We will maintain a class blog on which you will post frequent reading responses, and we will host optional afternoon poetry cafés, where Emily and Liza will be available on campus to provide personal feedback on your poems.

#### Final project:

*It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably everyday  
for lack  
of what is found there.*

William Carlos Williams

*Never forget justice is what love looks like in public.*

Dr. Cornel West

Can poetry function to make *your* community more just? If we take for granted the sentiments of West and Williams, how can we use digital tools to increase public access to poetry, and by extension, to make our society more vital and fair? In this project, you'll begin by identifying a group or community to which you belong. Using action research methodologies, reflect on your personal relationship to this group and how you believe poetry could serve it. Assess the demographics, needs, and level of technological access in this community. Then choose a digital medium from the many we have studied and explain how this medium makes sense to showcase a poetic text. In the final week of class, we'll transform the seminar into a digital humanities lab to develop and implement these projects. This work will be accompanied by a final paper reflecting on the methodology of your project, the thinkers by which it is informed, and the ways it enacts and interprets the content of the texts have you chosen to curate.

Week 1: Poetry and Communal Identities		
Monday June 27	Course introduction: "Someone is writing a poem," Adrienne Rich "Poem," Muriel Rukeyser Excerpts from <i>Beowulf</i> "Reconceiving Beowulf: Poetry as Social Praxis" John D. Niles	
Tuesday, June 28	From <i>Running in the Family</i> by Michael Ondaatje, pg 83–86 & 92–94 "Diving into the Wreck," Adrienne Rich "Boundary Conditions," Dan Chiasson "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin	
Wednesday, June 29	Excerpt from "Imagined Communities," Benedict Anderson "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin Preface to the first edition of <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , Whitman Archive "London," "The Chimney Sweeper," Tyger" Optional: Explore William Blake Archive Wax cylinder recording of Walt Whitman reading "America" "The Whitman Recording," Ed Folsom	

Thursday, June 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal</i>, Aimé Césaire, tr. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith</li> <li>• New York Public Library digital exhibition on Négritude</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>Decolonizing the Mind</i>, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, pg 87–107 (course pack)</li> <li>• "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," Gil Scott-Heron</li> </ul>	
Friday, July 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Towards a Politics of Mere Being," Carl Phillips</li> <li>• <i>DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media</i>, Ed Matt Ratto, Megan Boler, 329–357 (course pack). Note: There are some scholarly terms in these texts that we will define and discuss as a group. Come to class with examples of passages and scholarly terms that you have questions about.</li> <li>• "Grrl, Collected" by Lisa Darms, <i>The Paris Review</i></li> <li>• Optional: There are examples of Riot Grrrl zines in the course pack, after <i>DIY Citizenship</i>, that you can read for fun. They are not assigned as homework since we will be seeing real zines Friday afternoon!</li> </ul>	<p><b>Begin making your own zine.</b> We will work on these over the course of the summer using creative exercises from class and optional afternoon poetry cafés. Share on July 22.</p>
Week 2: The Poet Looking Outward and Inward		
Monday, July 4	<b>NO CLASS JULY 4</b>	
Tuesday, July 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Craft Vs. Conscience," Ange Mlinko</li> <li>• "Poetic authority and the public sphere of politics in the activist 60s: the Duncan-</li> </ul>	Assignment 1 due (2 pp; topic TBA)

	<p>Levertov debate," Anne Dewey (course pack; read pp. 114–120)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Excerpts from Duncan &amp; Levertov letters (course pack; read pp. 660–686 )</li> <li>● "Tenebrae," Levertov (Genius on blog)</li> <li>● "My Mother Would be a Falconress," Duncan (Genius on blog)</li> </ul>	
Wednesday, July 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>The Book of the Dead</i>, Muriel Rukeyser. Skim the whole book but focus on these poems, Geniusing significant words, phrases, and images: "The Road," "Statement: Phillipa Allen," "Gauley Bridge," "Absalom," "The Disease," "George Robinson: Blues," "Juanita Tinsley," "The Doctors"</li> <li>● "Defacing the Monument: Rukeyser's Innovations in Docupoetics," Susan Briante <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "The Colonel," Carolyn Forché</li> </ul> </li> <li>● "On a Poetry of Witness," Carolyn Forché</li> <li>● "Johannesburg Mines," Langston Hughes (on blog)</li> </ul> <p><b>In Class Afternoon poetry café</b></p>	
Thursday, July 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction to <i>Ecopoetry Anthology</i></li> <li>● Introduction to <i>Black Nature Poetry</i>, Camille Dungy (till the top of sixth page of article; stop at "implicates the black community and the human race at large in emotional, practical, and creative ways.")</li> <li>● Excerpts in course pack from <i>Black Nature Poetry</i>. Poems by Phillips, Clifton, Gay</li> <li>● <i>Deepstep Come Shining</i> by C.D. Wright</li> </ul>	
Friday, July 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "The United Fruit Company" by Pablo Neruda</li> <li>● "Romance Sonambulo," Federico Garcia Lorca <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Requiem," Anna Akmatova</li> <li>● "Death Fugue," Paul Celan</li> <li>● Pen Defending Writers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

	<p>Please Google each of these writers to get a sense of their political/ historical context. Add Genius annotations with relevant links or information.</p> <p><b>Visit to Cornell printing press</b></p>	
<b>Week 3: The Medium is the Message</b>		
Monday July 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from "Two Women Poets of 1970s Brazil"</li> <li>• "Margins and Marginals: New Brazilian Poetry of the 1970s," part I, pp. 18–26</li> <li>• Examples of Poesia Marginal: "What Kind of Country is This?" and poems by Ana Cristina Cesar (Genius on blog)</li> </ul>	Assignment 2 due (3–4 pp; topic TBA)
Tuesday July 12	<b>In class visit Cornell Hip Hop Archives</b>	
Wednesday July 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</i>, Marshall McLuhan (Genius on blog, making notes about how the medium is the message in the texts we've considered so far this week)</li> </ul> <p><b>Review readings for Tuesday:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Coded Language" Saul Williams, Def Poetry Jam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Nothing is for Nothing," Jill Scott</li> <li>• "Motives and Thoughts," Lauryn Hill</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Excerpt from Breakbeat Poet Anthology</li> <li>• "Not an Elegy for Mike Brown," Danez Smith <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Ali Rap" promo trailer</li> </ul> </li> <li>• DJ Rich Medina's "Crate Diggers" webisode</li> <li>• Refine a poem to share at poetry café</li> </ul> <p><b>Afternoon poetry café</b></p>	
Thursday July 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Engagement, race, and public poetry in America," Timothy Yu</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "After Yi-Fen Chou" (read the introduction to the forum)</li> <li>• "A Brief History of Name Fuckery," Larissa Pham</li> <li>• #ActualAsianPoets examples: "XX" by Sally Wen Mao (on blog), "Hello, the Roses," by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, "This Room and Everything in It," by Li-Young Lee, "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong," by Ocean Vuong, "The Fold," by Jose Perez Beduya</li> </ul>	
Friday July 15	<p>Two case studies in online activism and poetry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #BlackPoetsSpeakOut (explore the Tumblr, watching videos and reading blog information)</li> <li>• Mahogany Browne on #BlackPoetsSpeakOut</li> <li>• "America, November 2014," Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon</li> <li>• "Rape Joke," Patricia Lockwood</li> <li>• "Patricia Lockwood's Crowd-pleasing Poetry," Adam Plunkett</li> <li>• "How Not to Review Women's Writing," Mallory Ortberg</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Week 4: New Possibilities &amp; Unexpected Consequences</b></p>		
Monday July 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Multimedia Quake Poetry: Convergence Culture after the Sichuan Earthquake," Heather Inwood</li> <li>• Jenkins on Collective Intelligence and Convergence Culture (Genius on Blog)</li> <li>• Come to class prepared with your own example of convergence culture to share</li> </ul>	<p>Essay 3 due (2-3 pp.) Submit peer review sheet with your essay</p> <p>Post a summary of Latour on the blog!</p>
Tuesday July 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Technology is Society Made Durable," Bruno Latour (course pack, pp. 103–114)</li> </ul>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teju Cole's Twitter Literature, "Web Poets' Society," Erasure tool at Wave Books</li> <li>● Come to class with your own examples of online tools, platforms and communities that increase access to poetry</li> </ul>	
Wednesday July 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Why We Trade Privacy for Facebook Likes" Nausicaa Renner</li> <li>● "Great to Watch," from <i>The Art of Cruelty</i>, Maggie Nelson</li> <li>● In coursepack: "Reflection #2: Mugshot Movements," Emily Abendroth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Drone" by Solmaz Sharif</li> <li>● "Inside Beyonce," Cathy Park Hong</li> <li>● "Depression," Dorothea Lasky</li> </ul> </li> <li>● "I Want to Do Everything Wrong at Least Once," CAConrad (Genius on blog)</li> <li>● "On Surveillance Poetics," an interview</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Afternoon poetry cafe</b></p>	Start the digital arm of your zine!
Thursday July 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Amazon and Hachette: The dispute in 13 easy steps," Carolyn Kellogg</li> <li>● "Debate: Is Amazon The Reader's Friend?" NPR</li> <li>● "What will become of the library? How it will evolve as the world goes digital," Michael Agresta <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Library as Incubator Project</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1. Choose a book you want to purchase, and find three different ways to buy it online. Who profits? 2. Design your own small press. How and where will you sell books, to whom?
Friday July 22	Share zines	Submit zine, and the digital arm of your zine
<b>Week 5: Digital Humanities Lab</b>		
Monday July 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "A Short Guide to Digital Humanities"</li> <li>● "How did they make that?," Miriam Posner</li> <li>● "Neoliberal Tools (and Archives): A Political History of Digital Humanities"</li> </ul>	

Tuesday July 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Excerpt from <i>On Photography</i>, Susan Sontag</li> <li>● <i>Live Hope Love</i>, Kwame Dawes. Watch introduction. Listen to interviews in "Vital Videos," focusing on interviews with John Marzouca, Annesha Taylor, Peter Figueroa. Read poems: "Hope's Hospice," "Coffee Break," "Nichol," "Live Up"</li> <li>● Read about the project at the Pulitzer Center</li> <li>● Digital Humanities Lab: Images, videos</li> </ul>	Conferences!
Wednesday July 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Watch Action Research overview video</li> <li>● "Conversations with America," Studs Terkel. Research among the Terkel's Greatest Hits</li> <li>● The Human Voice installation StoryCorps interview with Studs Terkel</li> <li>● Studs Terkel Digital Archive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gwendolyn Brooks Interview</li> <li>○ Instillation of Terkel interview with poet Maya Angelou</li> </ul> </li> <li>● "In the Office of Temporary Assistance," audio and text, from the "Women of Troy" project</li> <li>● Digital Humanities Lab: Audio Recording</li> </ul> <p><b>In-class poetry café</b></p>	Conferences!
Thursday July 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>When the Waters Came</i>, Cynthia Hogue</li> </ul> <p>Digital Humanities Lab: Conducting interviews</p>	
Friday July 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Don't Let Me Be Lonely</i>, Claudia Rankine</li> </ul>	Essay 4 due (2–3 pp; topic TBA)
<b>Week 6: Poetry in Life and Practice</b>		
Monday August 1	<i>The Life of Poetry</i> , Muriel Rukeyser	

	<p>Introduction and Chapter 1</p> <p>Ben Lerner on <i>The Hatred of Poetry</i></p> <p>Poetic responses to crisis: "All the dead boys look like me," by Loma, "If you are over staying woke" and interview with Morgan Parker</p> <p>Makerspace time</p>	
Tuesday, August 2	<p><i>The Life of Poetry</i>, Muriel Rukeyser</p> <p>Chapters 2 &amp; 3</p> <p>"Ars poetica," Rita Dove</p> <p>"The Poem," George Oppen (on blog)</p> <p>"Islands," Muriel Rukeyser</p> <p>Makerspace time</p>	Share ars poeticas on blog
Wednesday August 3	<p><i>The Life of Poetry</i>, Muriel Rukeyser</p> <p>Excerpts from Chapters 8 &amp; 9</p> <p>Pages 119–121, 131–132 &amp; 141–155</p> <p>Read the project write up Poets of Protest</p> <p>Documentary and watch</p> <p>Al Khadra: Poet of the Desert</p> <p>Mazen Maarouf: Hand Made</p> <p>Manal Al Sheikh: Fire Won't Eat Me Up*</p> <p>Makerspace time</p> <p>*the three other videos are optional</p>	Digital final projects due, 11:59 pm
Thursday August 4	<p>Present projects, discuss implementation</p> <p><i>The Life of Poetry</i>, Muriel Rukeyser</p> <p>Chapters 11 &amp; 13</p> <p>In-class poetry cafe</p>	Final papers due, 11:59 pm
Friday August 5	<p>Present Projects</p> <p>Looking ahead to the future</p> <p>Grant Writing workshop</p> <p>Course wrap up</p>	